

# How Can I Reduce My Risk of Being “Carjacked?”

## *Armed robbery . . . the newest twist in automobile theft*

*Imagine having someone approach you while you're sitting in your car at a traffic signal, point a gun at your face and take your car. Consider the thought of having your vehicle stolen as you park (even in your own driveway), or while getting gas.*

*It can happen anywhere, not just in “high crime” neighborhoods. It can occur during the daylight, as well as after dark.*

### **Why is carjacking on the increase?**

§ It's a crime of opportunity—a thief searching for the most vulnerable prey. Sometimes it's part of another crime.

§ Car thieves find it easier to steal a car while the owner is there—with the keys in the ignition—than to break into a car, especially if the car has an alarm.

§ Cars equipped with sophisticated, built-in alarm systems and theft-deterrent devices are becoming harder to steal.

§ Cars, especially luxury models, provide quick cash for drug users and other criminals.

§ Carjacking may be a rite of

passage, an initiation act or just a thrill for some.

### **Windows of opportunity that carjackers look for:**

§ Intersections controlled by traffic lights or stop signs.

§ Parking garages, shopping malls and grocery stores.

§ Self-service gas stations and car washes.

§ ATMs (automated teller machines).

§ Residential driveways and streets, as people get in and out of their cars.

§ Highway exit and entry ramps or other places where drivers slow down or stop.

### **Before you enter your car:**

§ Be alert to any activity near your car. Pay attention to your surroundings.

§ When approaching your car, have your key in your hand and check the back seat before getting in.

§ If someone is loitering near your unoccupied car as you approach it, keep walking until the person leaves.

§ Be wary of people asking for directions or handing out flyers. Trust your instincts—if something makes you feel uneasy, get into the car quickly, lock the doors and drive away.

### **Once you are in your car:**

§ Keep your doors and windows locked, no matter how short the distance or how “safe” the neighborhood.

§ Avoid driving alone. Have someone with you whenever possible, especially at night.

§ When you’re coming to a stop, leave enough space to maneuver around other cars. If you sense trouble, doing this will allow you the room needed to get away.

§ If a suspicious-looking person approaches your car, drive away carefully.

§ Drive in the inside (center) lane to make it more difficult for would-be carjackers to approach your car.

§ Don’t stop to assist a stranger whose car has broken down. Instead, get help by driving to the nearest phone and calling the police.

§ If you’re driving home and notice someone you don’t recognize, drive around the block and come back after the person has left.

### **Getting out:**

§ Park in well-lighted areas, near sidewalks or walkways. Avoid parking near dumpsters, woods, large vans or trucks, or anything else that limits your visibility.

§ Never leave valuables in plain view, even if the car is locked. Put them in the trunk or out-of-sight.

§ Try to park in a garage with an attendant. Leave only the ignition key, with no personal identification.

§ Even if you’re rushed, look around before you get out and stay alert to your surroundings.

If it happens to you:

§ If a carjacker threatens you with a gun or other weapon, give up your car. Don’t argue. Your life is worth far more than a car.

§ Get away from the area as quickly as possible.

§ Notice and remember what the carjacker looked like—sex, race, age, hair and eye color, special features, clothes and anything specific or unusual, like an accent.

§ Report the crime immediately to the police or sheriff

### **Take action**

§ Work with Neighborhood Watch groups, law enforcement, automobile clubs and other concerned groups to get the word out about carjacking prevention.

§ Contact school officials to make sure that driver education classes talk to teens about preventing carjacking.

§ Ask the local media to air carjacking prevention tips as public service announcements, perhaps during commuting hours.

§ Ask your insurance agent or company to provide carjacking, and other auto theft prevention information, in notices and bills.

§ Enlist parking lot owners, shopping mall security, and transit authorities to print and distribute educational materials with carjacking prevention tips.

§ Get permission to place carjacking prevention flyers or brochures in the waiting rooms of automobile service departments, repair shops and gas stations and/or

§ Ask the Department of Motor Vehicles to display carjacking and auto-theft prevention advice—posters, handouts, etc., in its offices—and to distribute prevention tips in all mailings.

## Carjacking Prevention

**V**ehicle robbery is by no means a new crime, nor is it sweeping the nation in epidemic proportions. Vehicle owners have been victims of this crime for decades. The term “carjacking” was coined by the news media. The term has raised fear levels out of proportion with the actual probability of becoming a victim.

Realistically, this is a crime of low probability, but potentially high consequences. Being the victim of a “carjacking” can be dangerous, even deadly. Experts theorize improvements in vehicle alarm systems, locking devices and other anti-car theft technology have made it more difficult to steal cars using traditional, surreptitious methods. Now suspects take the vehicle, keys and other items of value from the victim while the victim is present.

Perpetrators utilize specific criteria to select their victims or targets. Perpetrators focus on people who are unaware or unprepared. Whether driving, or walking to your vehicle, you can significantly increase your personal safety and reduce the risk of becoming a victim with the proper attitude. The attitude you convey while in or approaching your vehicle can have a discouraging effect on potential attackers. Walk and drive

purposefully, with confidence. Give the appearance that you are totally aware of your surroundings. Be aware of what is going on around you; the people, the total environment. Street criminals prefer to avoid people displaying this demeanor.

“Carjackings” can happen anywhere -- in a parking lot, on a street or freeway, or in one’s own driveway. Never wait for a potentially dangerous situation to occur. Periodically perform mental exercises and think about what you would do in this personal safety situation. Follow your instincts. If you feel you are in danger, react. Your personal safety is the first priority in a time of emergency. Do anything you can to draw attention to yourself and attempt to flee the area.

Things to do to reduce risk of becoming a “carjacking” victim:

§ Know the area of your travels.

§ When traveling out of town, plan all trips carefully. Carry maps with routes and destinations clearly marked. Service your vehicle regularly to ensure it is mechanically sound. It is much safer to travel on main roads during daylight hours.

§ When possible, drive in the lane nearest the center of the road to distance any would-be pedestrian attacker from your vehicle. Drive on well-lighted, well-traveled streets.

Avoid shortcuts that take you on dark, isolated streets.

§ When stopped in traffic, leave sufficient space between your vehicle and any vehicle in front of yours. If someone approaches in a threatening manner, the open space will allow you to move forward or leave the location.

§ Do not park next to vans or other high profile vehicles that could conceal a suspect. When returning to your vehicle, have your keys in hand and be ready to unlock and enter your vehicle without delay.

§ If your vehicle breaks down on the road, attempt to move your vehicle to a safe location. Activate the emergency flashers and stay locked inside until help arrives. If someone stops to offer assistance, request they summon help from an authorized emergency roadside service.

§ If the driver of a vehicle with no markings motions you to pull over to the side of the road, do not pull over. Keep driving to the nearest open business or where other people are present. However, comply immediately when directed by an officer in a marked vehicle. Nevertheless, if you sense anything out of the ordinary, you may request to see identification. Law enforcement officials understand this type of concern.

§ If you feel you are being followed by another vehicle, do not drive home. Drive to the nearest police or fire station.

If one is not nearby, drive to an open business and honk your horn.

§ If you are involved in a minor traffic accident and suspect suspicious circumstances, do not check the damage in a remote area or on the freeway. Motion the other driver to follow you to the nearest police station, fire station or open business to exchange information.

§ If you are attacked, the suspect has a weapon, and he or she demands your valuables or vehicle, comply. Your property can be replaced or recovered later.

§ Once you and your attacker are in your vehicle, the “carjacker” has total control. There is no way to predict if the “carjacker” will harm you. One tactic you might consider, if you are outside your vehicle is to fall flat on the ground. The “carjacker” may not want to take the time to force you inside the vehicle.

